

From: Stroud, Fred
Sent: Fri 9/11/2015 5:50:43 PM
Subject: EPA lying about the 'spill'!

WATER POLLUTION:

Mine owner accuses EPA of lying about Colo. spill

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Published: Friday, September 11, 2015

The owner of the Gold King mine site in Colorado is accusing U.S. EPA of telling "absolute baloney of the worst sort" about the causes of last month's polluted water spill.

Todd Hennis made his comments to ColoradoWatchdog.org, backed by the conservative Franklin Center for Government and Public Integrity following comments this week by EPA Assistant Administrator Mathy Stanislaus.

Stanislaus told lawmakers on the House Science, Space and Technology Committee that the spill resulted from "cave-ins and water buildup" (Greenwire, Sept. 11). EPA's contractor was studying ways of resolving pollution concerns at the site.

But Hennis said, "They blocked off the flow of water out of the drain pipes and they created the huge wall of water in the Gold King by their actions last year."

Hennis has been critical of EPA action before, including accusing the agency of forcing him to allow officials onto the mine site by threat of fines.

"The photos clearly show the EPA backfilled the portal to block water from coming out, and they blocked the discharge pipes at the same time," he said.

The agency said after the spill that its plan was to "excavate the loose material that had collapsed into the cave entry back to the timbering."

A preliminary EPA report of the spill said the agency and its contractor underestimated the risk of a blowout. They did not realize the water pressure magnitude behind the blockage (E&ENews PM, Aug. 26).

Laura Allen, EPA deputy press secretary, said today that the agency's review did not make a finding of what ultimately caused the release, a point she said Stanislaus made clear to lawmakers.

"As Mr. Stanislaus has said, we are awaiting the results of the independent investigation from the U.S. Department of the Interior and the EPA inspector general before determining the cause of the release," said Allen, noting that EPA is in touch with Hennis' attorneys.

EPA critics, including Republican lawmakers, have questioned the agency for its involvement at Gold King. But EPA defenders say the agency was responding to the ongoing polluted water leaking from the site (Greenwire, Sept. 9).

"Blaming the EPA for the Animas River mine waste disaster is like blaming the fire department for kicking

down your door to put out your house fire. After you ignored the fire marshal's warnings. And cut the fire department's budget," mining watchdog group Earthworks said this week.